

## **A DOG'S LIFE: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A STRAY**

### **Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2008 Grades 3-5**

Submitted by Jason Bourg, Graduate Student, LSU School of Library & Information Science (Professor: Dr. Margie Thomas); and Dorothy L. Grimsley, Instructor, University of Louisiana at Lafayette

**A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray** by Ann M. Martin. Scholastic Press, 2005. 182 pages.

#### **Summary**

Squirrel, a sweet, gentle female dog, narrates her story about struggling to survive after her mother is taken from her. At first she is with her brother named Bones, but then she is on her own. Her life is filled with hardship, danger and loneliness, as she wanders from town to town. At the end she does find comfort and friendship when she meets an elderly woman who takes her in. It is then that these two souls find exactly what they have been searching for—each other. Readers who love dog stories will enjoy this heart-wrenching saga that ends happily.

#### **Awards**

Book Sense Book of the Year Award: Honor Book 2006

Henry Bergh Children's Book Award: Finalist 2005 Fiction Companion Animals

#### **Author's Biography**

Ann Martin was born on August 12, 1955. She grew up in Princeton, New Jersey, and graduated from Smith College. She was a teacher and a book editor before becoming a full-time author. She is the author of the popular *Baby-sitter's Club* series. She has just started writing a new series set in a small New England town called *Main Street*. The first title in the series is *Welcome to Camden Falls*. *A Corner of the Universe* is a 2003 Newbery Honor book, and *Belle Teal* was named a Publisher's Weekly Best Book in 2001. She now lives in upstate New York with her dog and cats.

<http://www.scholastic.com/annmartin/>

<http://www.scholastic.com/annmartin/authform.asp>

#### **Other Titles By Ann Martin**

*On Christmas Eve*

*A Corner of the Universe*

*Belle Teal*

*The Baby-sitter's Club Series*

*The Kids in Ms. Colman's Class*

*Snail Mail No More*

#### **Related Titles**

*The Good Dog* by Avi.

*The BossQueen, Little BigBark and the Sentinel Pup* by Sarah Clark Jordan.

*Dog!* by Gary Paulsen.

*Lewis and Clark and Me: A Dog's Tale* by Laurie Myers.

*Stay! Keeper's Story* by Lois Lowry.

*The Incredible Journey* by Sheila Burnford.

*Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell.

*Whittington* (Newbery Honor Book) by Alan Armstrong. Illustrated by S.D. Schindler. This story is told from the perspective of a wandering cat.

### **Classroom Connections**

#### **Create a Comic Strip**

- Give students blank comic strips and have them draw Squirrel through each of her adventures.
- Each frame could represent the friends and the enemies she encounters along the way.
- The comic strip technique provides a visual storyline and helps the students express their perceptions of the story.

#### **Create a Journal or Letter**

- Instead of writing a traditional book report, students could write a journal or letter to the main character, Squirrel, after each one of her adventures.
- Within the book, each chapter is essentially a mini-story of adventure. Students can write to Squirrel asking, for example, “Are you still missing Bone, your brother?” “Where do you think you will go from here, Squirrel?”
- Squirrel, was constantly homesick and lonely. Ask the students to express their feelings about being away from home or separated from their parents.
- *The Incredible Journey* by Sheila Burnford is a classic story about 2 dogs and a cat that journey across the Canadian wilderness. Read this book to the class and compare and contrast it with *A Dog’s Life*.
- Assign a specific breed of domestic dog to each student. Have students research information about that breed and make a PowerPoint or other type of presentation.
- Have students locate another book about a dog, read the book and give a book report using a format, such as a mobile, diorama, poem, etc.

### **Web Sites**

#### **The New York Public Library**

<http://www.nypl.org/chat/AnnMMartin.html>

This site offers a transcript from a live chat with the author at the New York Public Library where she discusses her creative process.

#### **The Humane Society of the United States**

[http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet\\_care/animal\\_angel\\_how\\_you\\_can\\_help\\_neighborhood\\_critters\\_in\\_need/what\\_to\\_do\\_when\\_you\\_find\\_a\\_stray\\_dog\\_or\\_cat/index.html](http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/animal_angel_how_you_can_help_neighborhood_critters_in_need/what_to_do_when_you_find_a_stray_dog_or_cat/index.html)

This site provides an excellent explanation about what to do if you encounter a stray animal.

#### **What to Do When You Find A Stray Dog or Cat**

[http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet\\_care/animal\\_angel\\_how\\_you\\_can\\_help\\_neighborhood\\_critters\\_in\\_need/what\\_to\\_do\\_when\\_you\\_find\\_a\\_stray\\_dog\\_or\\_cat/index.html](http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/animal_angel_how_you_can_help_neighborhood_critters_in_need/what_to_do_when_you_find_a_stray_dog_or_cat/index.html)

Guidelines for assisting animals safely and effectively.

#### **Common Questions about Microchips**

[http://www.hsus.org/pets/issues\\_affecting\\_our\\_pets/common\\_questions\\_about\\_microchips.html](http://www.hsus.org/pets/issues_affecting_our_pets/common_questions_about_microchips.html)

Experts at The Humane Society of the United States answer questions about Microchipping pets.